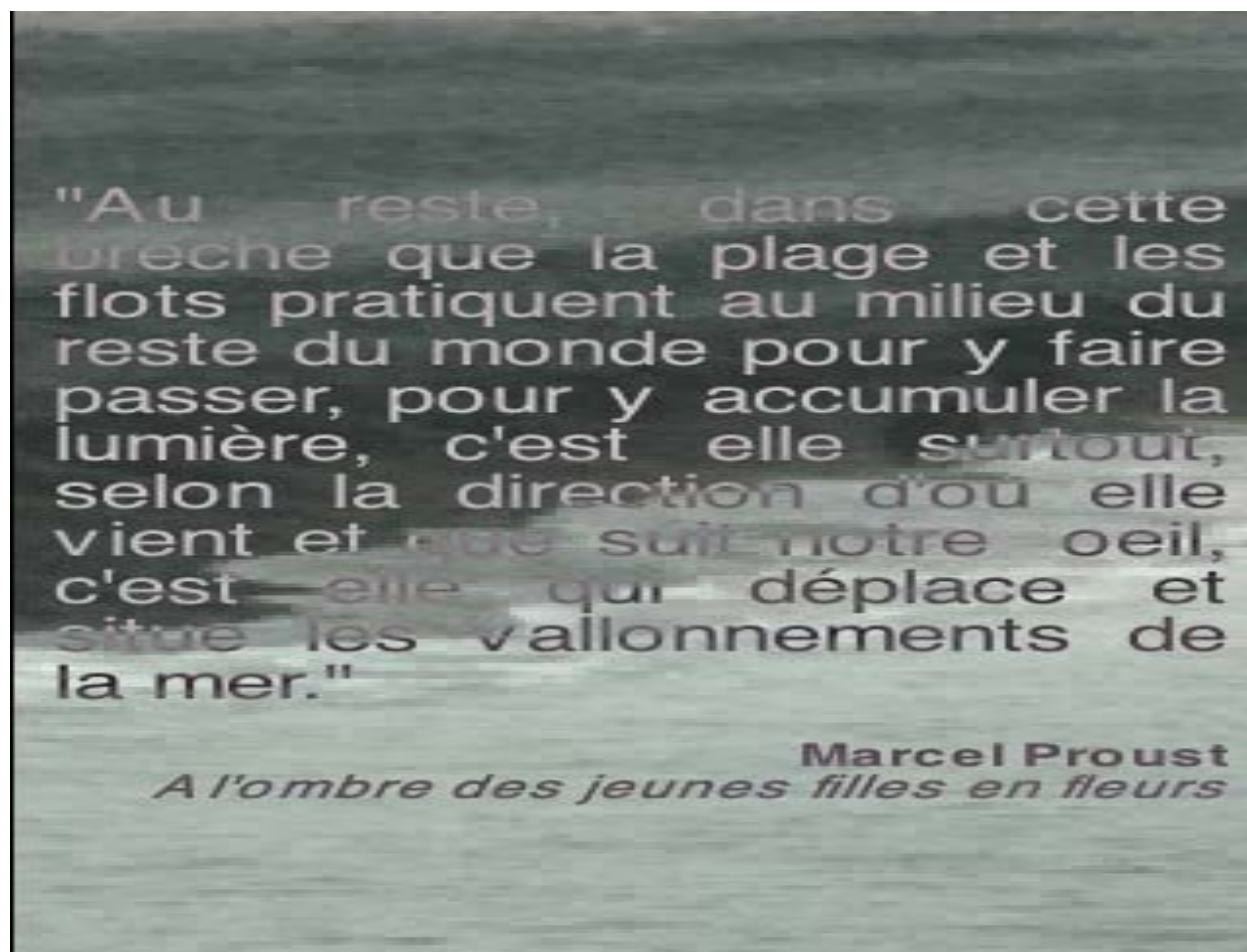


A City from three points of view

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Abstract

The paper proposes a presentation of a pedagogical methodology for the understanding of place and site in contemporary network conditions. A number of seminar sessions were held on London, to introduce the city to fifth year Architectural students enrolled in a course entitled "Territories of the Contemporary City", that took place at the Paris - Malaquais School of Architecture in 2001. As an instrument, the material was prepared on CD-ROM, allowing consultation away from the classroom. It consists of three distinct parts that introduce the current condition of the city, the tools of reference (cartography, imagery, legislation), discusses key initiatives and proposals, while opening the potential links between the different elements of the study. Chronologically, the first part is ludic in character allowing sequential and aleatory navigation, the second is a collaborative case study around a report produced by a partner University (UNL), while the final part presents the documents which constitute the substrate for urban regeneration activity in the United Kingdom. They are exemplified by projects on the Waterfront of Liverpool, in Manchester and the Thames Gateway London, described as "Europe's largest and most ambitious regeneration initiative. Extending from Tower Bridge eastwards to Thurrock and Bexley, the area has a powerful strategic location offering outstanding development opportunities for new jobs and homes, as well as environmental improvements" (Thames Gateway London Partnership presentation). The English texts are summarised in French and appear in distinct windows or screens, allowing annotation from discussion and persisting between the parts as an aide-memoir.

The work has as an objective to identify the relevant systems and phenomena involved in urban practices, whether of a professional nature, or belonging to the urban experience. At the same time, at stake is understanding how respectively complex systems exemplified by the potential of networks, may be at once consistent and coherent, as well as defining their relationships (transformations, pluralism, proximity, simultaneity, autonomy, dependencies, associations...)

The Plot of Reality

I wish to present the CD-ROM “Trois angles sur une ville” from the point of view of its implications rather than describing its production or detailing its contents. I will however make ample reference to it during the presentation. The title of this section is chosen to draw attention to the working potential of different readings of the subject matter. If the “plot” is my construction, the reality influences it and is influenced by it. A “plot” is a term of multiple uses: it is a story line, a *narrative plot* - conceiving and arranging the action and incidents (as in literature and other narrative arts). It is a graph *plotting* the course of navigation (as in Geography), a measured area, a *plot of land*, a ground plan, as for a building (as in Architecture or Surveying), a *geometrical plot*, a *diagram*. It is also a *Mathematical plot* - a location by means of co-ordinates, a connection of points... I did not intend to discuss it as a secret plan although it is interesting that in law and politics the term is also present. All the disciplines mentioned above, present in most respectable Universities, are concerned with plots.

Society and its constructions, well reflected in cities, are still very much regulated by property lines, that is by land divisions into plots. Although they are not necessarily or singly determinant factors of urbanity, they constitute an omnipresent factor affecting urban architecture.

Bruno Latour remarked in his study of Paris, that we can no longer grasp or describe the city solely by its built form. In fact, we cannot at any moment describe it as a whole. Every city is a multiple city, where the traces of the ephemeral make up, when linked, the “figure of the social”. The “figure of the social” leaves its imprint in the “figure of the city”. As they configure each other respectively under different temporalities, the combination of the plots of land, the plotting of the traces of life as the city is used and their linking remain a constant reference framework for the development of urban life.

In the introduction to his book “*Projet Urbain*”, my colleague Philippe Panerai, President of the new Architecture School Paris-Malaquais, suggests that the importance of the plots of land lies in their capacity to constitute a generative framework for urban projects:

“Instead of aping the ancient city, or giving it the “signs of urbanity”, thus depriving the inhabitants of the possibility of inscribing themselves the signs of their own history, we propose... to rethink the techniques of land division into plots (lotissement), as a means to create the initial framework which will allow urban life to develop” .

This remark questions the role of the architect: who traditionally was bound to become the provider of the ‘ideal’ shell for urban living. To open the discipline to other conditions than the conventional commission implies the acquisition of a certain level of competence in areas not covered by conventional practice. To declare an interest in multi-disciplinarity is no guarantee of coherent and fruitful collaborations; the question of built form measures with ease the areas enclosed by edifices and the corresponding infrastructures and facili-

ties, but does not necessarily determine the development of urban life in the conditions of often unpredictable evolution at irregular pace.

Reality exceeds and modifies the conditions of a commission at urban scale. A programme is less a vision than a reflection of reality. As such, it will quantify and enable particular configurations, but not determine either outcome or urban experience. That will happen as a result of the interaction of different programmes, each set up following certain aspects of urban reality:

“Starting from reality means accepting the actual programmes in the way they are established and financed, while inscribing them in a new perspective which takes into account from the very beginning the possible evolution, the densification, the substitutions, the changes of use. It means to predict that sooner or later shops will arrive in a residential quarter, that the patterns of work evolve, that the urban fabric will have to respond to demands that would not have yet emerged at the time of construction”.

All we have seen above, points to the need to recognise the existence of two kinds of reality which impact on contemporary urban experience. I would suggest that it is necessary to introduce both explicitly both as part of the research and in the proposals for regeneration or any other form of development of urban life.

The first is the macro-physical reality of cities as buildings and infrastructures: they are the carriers of the information we use to spend our daily lives under the scaffold of fixed relationships. The second is the one where we operate on a territory of connections, associations, memories and projections which open our behaviour to spatial and temporal conditions different from those encountered in the macro-physical reality. This is bringing up another level of perception made possible by the contemporary ubiquity of *cyber-space-time*. This makes for “another” city, open to discontinuity and to juxtapositions not necessarily bound by property and authority lines, or by their subsequent cause and effect logistics. It functions by the process of indefinitely unfolding and folding the materiality of information towards the creation of other generative conditions for urban projects and programmes.

It seems that at stake is a re-configuration of two key elements in the fabrication of programme and its development as project: time and space or rather timetable and site. Bernard Stiegler renames them as *calendarity* and *cardinality*. He defines the aspects of these two elements as qualities of social organisation and material articulation. They are linked and mutually inclusive:

“- *Calendarity*, which accentuates social life by writing the cosmic rhythms in a ritual symbolism: this means the calendar as such, but also the “soup” of local singularities which form the *behavioural programmes*;

- *Cardinality*, which traces the limits of territories, confines the representations and constitutes the systems of orientation and the instruments of navigation in space as much as in time (from the maritime map to the thesaurus and the index, passing through the school textbook and the names - whether of cities and streets

or of people, which are in this case cardinal elements as much as calendar ones)."

Planning, drawing plans, is no longer sufficient to configure urbanity, although the land in our cities is still very much used according to sub-division in plots. Recognising the fluid quality of contemporary urban life implies operating with different instruments than those given to fixed geographic descriptions. Every river has a basin, a catchment area, but within these large denominators, the flow is not adequately described. If we extrapolate this simple example to our cities, it implies that the notion of proximity is no longer primarily a physical measure of neighbourhood. Instead, it becomes a condition of programme. A programme that admits juxtapositions, uncertainty, the ephemeral. It becomes necessary to choose the instruments and the methods of work accordingly.

Networks and Programmes

I referred above to the notion of proximity as a condition of programme. In the case of two people using telephones at the same time in an international airport, proximity is more a condition of who one is talking to - a parent say, at 2000 miles away, than of the physical distance between them. The networks of communication exceed the limits of pre-determined territories, transform them without negating them. These networks carry rhythmic flows of data (material) and in this sense they are already programmatic. They do not represent at any time a single programme: communication in the form of network allows a grouping of programmes in multiple configurations, never assembling a whole, regulated by conditions of locality and temporality.

The traditional Cultural Industries, first radio and then television have established for more than half a century the relationship of programmes and networks, creating their own formats both as patterns of distribution over local or regional territories and of inscription in a daily, weekly, seasonal timetable. Whether short wave, long wave, medium wave or fm, uhf or vhf, they were operating within the space of a central broadcasting system, producing and distributing information within their catchment area. This was fitting central planning models, engineering infrastructures of strategic importance, clear boundaries. As the broadcasting stations and their transmitters are replaced today by connected servers and the waves technology by digital encoding, the conditions of accessibility replace those of proximity.

Under the terms outlined above, the task of the architectural educator involves the conscious production of pedagogical instruments and methods able to address the questions raised by the potential of practice in the contemporary urban conditions. This objective is part of the founding texts of the Paris-Malaquais School of Architecture and which I endeavour to develop in the format of the CD-ROM.

In the graduate seminar "Territories of the Contemporary City", that took place at the Paris - Malaquais School of Architecture in 2001,

a number of sessions were held on London, to introduce the city to fifth year Architectural students. This task led me to the necessity to construct an *instrument* that would function in network conditions. It is an attempt to find ways to gather and present information on a contemporary urban condition, as well as to incite the students to make choices so as to constitute their own database and to develop their own competence in the field of knowledge which would eventually enable them to address the issues of urban development.

Turn and Roll, Interface and Format

Narrative Plot Construction

The interface which I constructed for the CD-ROM on London, develops two modes of “navigation”, which I define as “turn and roll”

In French, cinematographic vocabulary refers to two successive operations in the making of films: *tournage et montage*. The first is the shooting of the film, creating the raw takes, whereas the second one is the assembly of the chosen scenes (*prises*) in sequences of various durations. In English, the equivalent operations are called *rolling the camera and editing* the resulting sequences.

It is not my purpose here to discuss the semantic differences, but rather to draw attention to what might bring together these culturally different descriptions of the same operations. And this on a wider territory than the national, as exemplified by the Internet. If we accept that *turning and rolling* are mutually revealing, the topological notion of *feuilletage*, offers a modelling device for the use of this network of networks of communications, which accesses information not merely by following an arborescent organisation, but by projecting it on a reticular space in folding and unfolding circulation patterns..

The format of an autonomous CD-ROM has certain advantages over a web site: it is designed with interaction in mind, it is not constrained by the capacity of the server available, not limited by the speed of connection, easier to handle the higher resolution images, or optimised movement, as well as high fidelity sounds. Furthermore, it is suited to public presentation through its portability, especially if it can run in parallel with a low-band internet connection for the purpose of live or delayed exchange between interested parties.

P(l)anorama of London: Choice and consequences

Plotting the course

In the CD-ROM, the game is to identify a territory and to mark the factors contributing to that identity. The advance is not aleatory: the images and related maps are following a West to East direction and the basin of the River Thames; however, the speed of the stream of images creates an almost continuous and unpredictable flow with the help of retinal inertia. It is one form of representing the diversity and simultaneity of urban experience. The counterpoint is given by simultaneous multiple photographic exposure of the same scene creating a frozen reverse panorama. On the one hand, time as programmed dissolves the location, on the other, it adds the depth of

multiple aspects. The result is an invitation to explicitly construct out of these complementary and in some ways contrary elements, one's own image of the city at a given moment. From this starting point, made to look like synchronised databases, further research hypotheses and specific proposals can emerge. The conventions of representation used are: assembled simultaneous photography, sequences of maps related to aerial photographs and a series of photographs of specific projects and places. They appear in separate windows rendering possible different combinations. They can be stopped and retained, or advanced following the internal logic of each window as well as the interaction between the aerial photographs and the map. The advance is cyclic and often controllable by the "reader". Autonomy and connection find their expression in differentiating the material. This first part of the CD-ROM is primarily visual, no texts are introduced. The choices were made with a course bibliography in mind. The result is neither a panoramic view, nor a map; instead, connected samples obtain the legitimacy that expression confers a portrait.

An Urban Regeneration Project: The Team

Diagrams and Connections

Perhaps the most interesting aspect emerging out of the Holloway Transverse Discussion Group Report is the potential links between the different aspects of the projects under development for this SRB Urban Regeneration proposal. For its presentation, the published report was unfolded into three sections: key elements of the study were identified, the conclusions, or rather the proposals made by the report were presented and on-going student projects for the area were illustrated with their complicity. As the Report was primarily text-based, a partial translation to French was simultaneously provided. The "Elements" are offered in the logical sequence of the Report, the "Proposals" are overlaid on the corresponding diagrams and re-grouped, the "Studies" are drawing attention at an architecturally urban scale to aspects implied but not treated as such by the Report. The three parts of the presentation draw on the differences of approach and practice inherent in the disciplines engaged in the fabrication of the content. The construction finds its potential of collaboration in the transgression of the initial logic by future cross-linking. The activation of such links would, as the Report implies in its conclusion, create the necessary Urban Regeneration dynamic.

Urban Renaissance: Rules and References

Political and Legal Plans

An ensemble of documents produced at the initiative of the Government and linking central funding to the proposals and guidelines contained within regulates the reality of Urban Regeneration practice in the United Kingdom. As these are available in Portable Document Format (PDF) on the British Governments' Department of the Environment and Transport (DETR) site, they were included as reference. The accompanying translation attempts to give a summary of the issues as well as a help to orientation between the different projects and areas illustrated. The Thames Gateway area in particular measures

the necessity for collaborative investment and action in the extraordinary stretch in need of redevelopment, as much as the difficulties of the initiative.

Conclusion: Containers

It would be premature to compare the effects of the introduction of an instrument such as the CD-ROM or of a method of work such as the “turn and roll” with the impact of containerisation on the transformation of waterfronts worldwide. Philippe Panerai observed:

“We are moving towards an activity of corridor-harbours or terminals with a tendency to make the harbours themselves disappear; the traditional activities of wharfage, loading and unloading of ships, customs clearance, would all be done upstream, in the inland cities.”

I would propose however that the shipping container and the CD-ROM share some characteristics that are worth meditating upon:

- Both devices are standardised empty shells, whose transportability is directly determining their purpose and is determined by their contents.
- The logistics involve networks of different kinds, timing is of essence in the functioning of the systems thus constructed and as such are of programmatic nature
- The consequences of their use are the need to reconsider in terms of the urban domain the physical terrain they traverse, such as harbour basins and waterfronts (the Thames Gateway, Rouen, Le Havre or New Orleans and of course Barcelona).

There are of course many differences, as the containers and the networks they belong to are part of macro-physical reality. The space-time materiality constructed in the medium of the CD-ROM belongs to a different kind of reality, one in which both linear causality and the sequence of cause and effect may be suspended and where discontinuity can not only be thought but also experienced. The mechanism that the CD-ROM develops in tune with the Internet, is interaction as an instrument of navigation through indefinite turning and rolling, arrested in the autonomy of the sufficient consistency of information for action. The primary interaction which is intended and which is part of the processes of learning and of invention, is the internal one, the one with ourselves in the different processes engaged in the constitution of the “imaginary”:

“For the first time in history, there is a possibility of integration of the finite which we are, in the unity between the infinitely small and the infinitely large. In the measure where this “finite” is the crystal where is reflected the infinitely conscious, we assist perhaps at the birth of the first historic kind of ternary interaction (infinitely small, infinitely large, infinitely conscious). There is here an ontological chance, which can easily

be wasted, missed if it is not recognised as such."

I think that this chance may be grasped in the first place, by looking afresh at the "containers" we propose for the acquisition of knowledge. Shipping containers are neutral objects, yet their effect is both localized and widespread. Would it be worth considering the potential of our own pedagogical instruments as a step towards integrating the different levels of reality presented by the contemporary condition of the city to the perceptive citizen?

Whether we are talking about plots of land disposed vertically or horizontally, shipping containers or the cd-rom, we are dealing with what I would call "framework objects" engaged in networks which are multiply figuring in interaction. Their interest lies in their potential to influence by calendarity and cardinality the relevant conditions of urban development.

Post scriptum

Since the production of the CD-ROM, developments in Britain have rather slowed down the dynamic of "Urban Renaissance", so emphatically proposed by the Urban Task Force led by Lord (Richard) Rogers. An Urban regeneration Bill was expected to follow up the Government's White Paper on Urban Renaissance and to "cement" (M. Goldschmied, President of the RIBA) the proposals. This has not been included in the next legislative session of the Parliament. The related overhaul of the planning system was also put on hold and it looks like it might not come up on the legislators' agenda until 2003. Finally, the complications of Regeneration Finance make the practical set up of Regeneration proposals dependent on too many factors that have braking rather than facilitating effects.

Under the alea of political and legal progress, it becomes even more important to continue to search for ways of overcoming the limitations of current practice. I consider that the educational environment, especially in the field of Architecture, is a fertile territory for innovation. Instead of working in a reactive way, responding to conditions already set or in abeyance, we need to work within the confines of the pedagogical and research opportunities at the creation of instruments and methods such as I attempted to describe above, as much as to seek to develop the theoretical grounds for these constructions. This may create a pro-active environment via a qualified approach to understanding and addressing societal development both creatively and professionally.

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